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## A RAY OF LIGHT ON THE GADSDEN TREATY

J. FRED RIPPY

There is scarcely a topic in American history about which so little is known as the negotiations connected with the Gadsden Treaty. The great secrecy with which they were conducted gave rise to a suspicion which is likely to continue until their nature has been made public. It may be that when all is revealed the discredit which has tended to rest upon the whole affair will prove unfounded. At any rate, the historian's curiosity regarding the matter is well-nigh irresistible.

It is known that there were several important questions to be settled when Gadsden was dispatched to Mexico in the summer of 1853. By the eleventh article of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the United States government had been made responsible for the conduct of the Indians residing upon the borders of the two countries. This obligation had proved burdensome and the correspondence regarding the subject had been somewhat irritating. Difficulties regarding the survey of the boundary as laid down in the fifth article of the same treaty had culminated in the spring of 1853 in a grave dispute regarding the southern limits of New Mexico. The acquisition of Pacific possessions had rendered the routes adapted to interoceanic communication very important to the United States. One of these lay across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec within Mexican territory, and citizens of the United States had acquired concessions there, but the Mexican government had nullified the grant upon which their claims were based. This, too, gave rise to much protest and dissatisfaction. Moreover, the entire situation was complicated by the loud proclamations of manifest destiny on the part of a large group of Anglo-Americans, by the voracious appetites of the land-hungry, and by the filibuster raids which were constantly being launched against the Hispanic states to the south.

Gadsden's instructions embraced the boundary dispute, the question of responsibility for the incursions of the Indians into Mexico, and the right of way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. With reference to the last he was ordered not to resume negotiations, but to await further advices. His instructions regarding the first

two are not known. He was presented to the Mexican government on August 17,<sup>1</sup> and three days later Bonilla, the Mexican Minister of Relations, addressed a complaint to him regarding filibuster preparations in California.<sup>2</sup> He replied to this note two days afterwards, and then communications were exchanged regarding the depredation claims.<sup>3</sup>

This is virtually all that is definitely known regarding the negotiations, as the correspondence has never been published. If Gadsden ever revealed what took place, no record of such revelation has been found. But upon two occasions after the treaty had been concluded Santa Anna referred to the transaction, and his statements are here presented. The first (Document A) is taken from the address issued to his fellow-citizens while he was in exile at Santo Tomás;<sup>4</sup> the second (Document B) is from his memoirs as published by Genaro García.<sup>5</sup> The well-known character of Santa Anna, and the circumstances under which the statements were made will cause the historian to accept them *cum granu saltis*, but they are, nevertheless, interesting as almost the only light we have on this affair. In the translation I have striven to be literal, even at the expense of the best English.

#### *Document A\**

One of the motives which has served my opponents to wound me cruelly has been the boundary treaty with the United States. I shall therefore make the proper explanations on this point, referring to the data which are in the hands of the Minister of Relations, and to the testimony of six honorable ministers with whom I sufficiently discussed this grave affair.

The government was forced to give preference to the disagreements which the United States was stirring up over the boundary which the unfortunate treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo marked out;

\*Moore, *Digest of International Law*, I, 462.

\*Bolton MSS. (Bancroft Library, University of California).

\*Moore, *op. et loc. cit.*

\*This address is entitled as follows: "El General Antonio L. de Santa Anna a sus Compatriotas, San Thomas, Abril 12 de 1858."

\**Documentos Inéditos ó muy raros para la Historia de Méjico*, II, 106-111. The main body of the memoirs is dated Nassau, Bahama Islands, November 23, 1870.

\*Grateful acknowledgment is due C. M. Montgomery of the Spanish department at the University of California for assistance in the translation of these documents.

for with this motive a considerable Anglo-American force was threatening the Department of Chihuahua, and to evade the war into which we were being provoked was a most urgent matter. The Commandante General in fulfillment of his duty, had collected all the troops at his disposition and was already advancing upon the Americans; but [this force] being insufficient to resist successfully, I ordered him to be warned "that under no circumstances was he to make any hostile demonstration against the troops of the United States, and that with prudence and dissimulation he should fall back to the capital of the Department, where he should remain on the defensive, leaving to the supreme government the affair which was being discussed, since it pertained to it exclusively." Moreover, he was told "that in the situation of the republic any indiscretion which would commit it to a war for which it was not prepared would be a crime."

Indeed, the disarmament of the country could have been no more deplorable. I had just observed with bitterness that the plaza of Vera Cruz, the fortresses of Ulúa and Perote were dismantled and, consequently, incapable of being defended. The national government had done nothing in five years to repair the spoliation and ruin of the invaders, although it had [at its disposal] fifteen million dollars in cash from the so-called indemnity. The other fortifications were no better. There was neither army nor navy, nor any depository. The guns in very small number were old and flint-locked. The frontier at all points of its vast extent was abandoned. Nor was there credit to procure supplies. In total, we had nothing with which to oppose the invaders arrogantly appearing along the frontier but the sad spectacle of our exceeding weakness. Under these circumstances, discretion and true patriotism imperatively counseled not to put aside the only means which would save all,—an immediate arrangement with the Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States recently presented at the capital with this object in view.

The Minister, Mr. Gadsden, in several conferences, said in substance: *that the land comprehended within the boundary marked by their engineers was absolutely necessary to the United States for the construction of a railway to Alta California which would assure them an easy and rapid communication with this state, and, therefore, he would be pleased if Mexico would cede peaceably and for a good indemnity that which possibly did belong to her; for in*

*the end that imperious necessity would compel them to occupy it in one way or another.* Once he made me proposals regarding Baja California, and part of Chihuahua and of Sonora, presenting a draft which showed the line that might be traced. This I rejected immediately, limiting myself to the question of boundaries. From these statements of the minister I understood that the United States was not even satisfied with possessing half of the Mexican territory.

In order to proceed with better knowledge and more accuracy in the business which occupied us, a report was requested from the engineer of the republic who knew the region from experience, which being presented was substantially as follows: "with the exception of the not very extensive valley of Mesilla, the rest [of the territory in question] was rocky mountains inhabited by Apaches, who, according to their custom, made war continually upon the adjacent departments."

After examining and considering everything in the junta of ministers, the principle was adopted that, of the evils, it was prudent and rational to prefer the least. Accordingly, the propositions of Mr. Gadsden relative to the territory in question were accepted with the remuneration of twenty million dollars which the government of the United States was to give to that of Mexico.

It is true that there was included in the treaty the annulment of an article of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by which the United States was bound to pursue the savages who were ravaging our frontier. But I never believed any criticism would fall upon my government on account of a proceeding which the honor and welfare of the nation counseled. This article, as all know, was put in by the Provisional Government of Querétaro in order that there might not appear only **THE HORRIBLE SACRIFICE OF HALF OF THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC FOR FIFTEEN MILLION DOLLARS**, but also something which might mislead, and which could be interpreted by some as favorable to Mexico. For my part, I declare that from the time I learned of its contents, then in a foreign country, I understood perfectly that, along with the sacrifice, there was the farce and the humiliation, besides other consequences fatal to the country. The farce, because that article would not be fulfilled by the United States, as it was not [observed] a single time from the years 1847 to 1853, neither would it ever be, because they have no interest

in the protection of our frontier, nor have we forces to hold them to the agreement. Humiliating, because we were begging from a foreign government a service which belonged exclusively to the nation; more humiliating still, because the one which was to perform the duty is the worst enemy of the Mexican government which it has offended and despoiled. [It would have] evil consequences on account of the very fact that the troops of the United States would be able to enter our territory when they desired; because of the introduction of contraband which would injure commerce and the treasury; and by reason of the hot-bed of questions to which the abuse that would be made of such an ominous article would give place,—in all of which Mexico, as usual, would receive the worst of the bargain.

Other factors of no little weight which, when taken into consideration, moved us to accept the proposition of Mr. Gadsden, were the condition of the public treasury until the reforms and retrenchments which were introduced should have their effect, the immediate defence of our national integrity, the demands of foreign creditors, the reorganization of the army which the revolution in the south was likewise demanding, and the urgent and unavoidable expenses of the administration. And, notwithstanding my deep conviction of the fact that the expedient adopted was the only one, absolutely the only one which could have saved the critical situation, I refused for a time to agree to the treaty, and gave a special dissenting opinion to the Minister of Relations by whom I hope it will be brought to light, in order that I may be better judged as to the sentiments which I entertained. My spirit was saddened by contemplating the abuse which was being made of our weakness, yet, of our weakness brought about by fratricidal strife. My heart, my sentiments, my character, and, above all, my love of country were going to be sacrificed by those lines which were traced for us and which I could not agree to without emotion. I should have preferred to reply to them, as at other times, with my sword. Would to heaven that my sufferings on account of this thing might be well understood, so as to merit compassion at least! I declare upon my honor that this was one of the great sacrifices which I have consecrated to the welfare of my country.

The Senate at Washington did not consider the treaty of Mr. Gadsden advantageous, and came near disapproving it unanimously, which is an indication that something more was to be

solicited from us. [This body finally] approved it after a long discussion, subtracting five from the twenty millions, and at the same time limiting the territory.

*Document B*

When in April, 1853, I took charge of the government of the republic, the political and financial horizon presented an unpleasant aspect. On the northern frontier our neighbors were threatening another invasion, if the question of boundaries was not arranged to their satisfaction; the savages and robber bands were freely carrying on their depredations; the army was destroyed, and the respectable military class prostrated; the parties were engaged in a stubborn fight and chaos was the only prospect.

The governments of Herrera and Arista had neglected the important branch of finance when they relied upon the fifteen million dollars from the dishonorable and injurious treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, as well as the settlement of the boundary which the security of the new frontier was urgently demanding.

The question of boundary was grave and demanded my attention preeminently. The government at Washington, with knife in hand, was still trying to cut another piece from the body which it had just horribly mutilated, and threatening another invasion. In the deplorable situation of the country, it seemed to me that a break with the colossus would be a foolish act; and I adopted the course which patriotism and prudence counseled,—a pacific settlement.

The Mexican engineers employed in marking the boundary had suspended their work because the disagreement grew threatening. An American division was already treading the soil of the state of Chihuahua, and the Comandante General was asking for orders and reinforcements. At this juncture, the Washington government sent to our capital Mr. Gadsden as Minister Extraordinary with ample powers to settle the question in a final manner.

The timely appearance of this envoy furnished an opportunity for the beginning of a negotiation not without notable occurrences.

In the first conference, the Minister of Foreign Affairs being present, the envoy extraordinary from Washington presented a map upon which appeared a new line retaining for the United States, Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, part of Durango and Chihuahua,—another half of the territory which they had left us. Vexed with such pretensions, I refused to look at the map, saying,

"this is not the matter which ought to occupy our attention." The minister withdrew the map and courteously offered not to present it again.

In the second conference the envoy presented another map on which the Valley of Mesilla figured as belonging to the United States; and this being the crux of the matter, upon it the discussion was centered. I upheld the well-founded contentions of the Mexican engineers which amounted to this: without violating the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Valley of Mesilla can not belong to the United States, since the line of division between the two republics is well marked and the Mexican republic has religiously fulfilled the pact.

In the next conference the Valley of Mesilla was the subject of discussion. The envoy extraordinary, impatient with the opposition which his pretension was encountering, let fall these exact words: "So far as my government is concerned, it cannot make any concession in regard to the matter which occupies us, the railway projected from New York to Alta California must proceed through Mesilla, because there is no other practicable route; the consent of the Mexican government would be splendidly rewarded."

In another session the envoy stood by his definitive resolution; but upon hearing me remark that the affair demanded contemplation, he completely lost control of himself and said emphatically: "Gentlemen, it is now time to recognize that the Valley of Mesilla in question must belong to the United States [either] for a stipulated indemnity, or because we shall take it." Such provocation naturally aroused my ire, but I was able to control myself and to hide it cleverly by dissimulation: mindful of the condition of the country, the head ruled the heart in such moments. And as if I had heard nothing, feigning distraction, I said to the envoy: "Mr. Gadsden, I hear you repeating *splendid indemnity*, and I have a curiosity to know how much it will amount to. I suppose it will not be so paltry as that offered for half of the Mexican territory." Surprised at my manner and language, he was unable to reply [for a moment, but at length] he answered thoughtfully and with stammering words: "Yes, a splendid indemnity," and the dialogue continued as follows:

"I plainly see that you are inclined to the negotiation and in conformity with my way of thinking; this pleases me, because thus



we avoid the scandal of seeing two neighboring and sister republics in discord at every step and presenting horrifying scenes of blood."

The envoy with apparent joy asked the government what value it placed upon the territory of Mesilla.

"You shall soon know; in cash I value it at fifty million pesos."

Mr. Gadsden sprang from his seat and, astonished, exclaimed, "Oh! fifty million pesos is a great deal of money!"

"My dear Sir, when a powerful nation has interest in the possession of another, it pays well."

"To-morrow I shall answer," and he left.

On the following day the envoy explained himself thus: "Convinced of the interest of my government in the early settlement of the matter which occupies us, I have determined to use the ample power with which it has invested me, and in its name, I propose that the treasury of the United States shall pay to the government of Mexico at the conclusion of the question of the Valley of Mesilla, twenty million pesos on these terms: upon approval of the treaty, ten million pesos, and the other ten at the end of a year."

The proposition exceeded by far what I had expected and I did not offer any objection: the trade was made. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Don Manuel María Bonilla, was charged with the duty of arranging the terms of the treaty in agreement with the envoy; concluded, it was examined and approved in a meeting of the cabinet.

In Washington twenty million pesos appeared a high price for the Valley of Mesilla. A senator said, "Mr. Gadsden lost his head, I am acquainted with the territory in question and am able to assure you impartially that it is not worth one-fourth of the stipulated sum." After much debate the Senate approved the treaty, after having subtracted ten million from the price agreed upon and something from the territory purchased.

My government, upon again considering the boundary treaty, reasoning with regard to the reduction made by the Senate at Washington, recognized that if it was impolitic to refuse their consent, there remained the satisfaction of having obtained for a piece of wild country relatively what they [the United States] gave for half of the national territory.